

Cultivating Culture



The new Mesa Arts Center

Sizing it Up

Mesa is the third largest city in Arizona and 43rd largest in the country, boasting a higher population than other well-known cities such as Atlanta, Minneapolis, St. Louis, Pittsburgh and Miami. Currently home to 450,000 residents, Mesa holds one of the highest growth rates in the country — and for good reason! Mesa is leading the way in living and economy standards, and is home to not only the largest school system in the state but also 16 schools of higher education, one of which is Arizona School of Health Sciences medical and dental school. Major industries in the area include Banner Health System with 6,100 employees, and Boeing, which employs more than 4,000.

With a number of unique indoor and outdoor attractions for all ages and areas of interest, residents and visitors alike are encouraged to gather friends and family to hit the town and discover what Mesa has to offer.

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Fresh Pickin's

About two years ago, the Hohokam Indian tribe, the first settlers in the area, engineered hundreds of canals and cultivated thousands of acres of land which serve as a foundation for Mesa's crops of cotton and citrus, among other fruits and vegetables. These days, farmers' markets run rich within city limits with farm-fresh produce gatherings held from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. every Friday at the Mesa Convention Center. Fresh produce, homegrown herbs, and local honeys, jams, breads, and fresh-cut flowers are showcased. Citrus and fruit stands, including Orange Patch and Mezona Citrus, along with Schnepf Farms, ready for peach picking season in May, are also sprinkled across the community, where a large variety of fresh treats await.

Creative Culture

Rich in culture, Mesa offers a selection of museums, historical sites and galleries. For a glance back in time, Mesa Southwest Museum serves as Arizona's natural history museum housing 80,000 square feet of dinosaur fossils, Hohokam Indian dwellings, recreation of the Lost Dutchman's Gold

Mine, a 50-foot waterfall and six changing exhibits. Nearby, the Sirrine House, located on the grounds of the last remaining school house of the 1900s, is a fully restored 1896 Victorian home with guided tours and trolley rides to the Mesa Historical Museum, housing 4,000 collectibles.

There's plenty for the little ones, too — creativity runs wild in ArtVille, the Southwest's newest bite-size community at Arizona Museum for Youth. Created especially for those under five years of age, ArtVille's mayor invites tiny guests into his house, kitchen, art studio, town square, university and park, where all destinations are designed to spark imagination, creativity and learning through colors, textures, workshops, exhibits and hands-on exploration. Visit the newest exhibit, *Jeepers Creepers: Bugs in Art*, running now through August.

Each year, Mesa's "Sculptures in the Streets" event invites residents and visitors alike outside for some fresh air with an exhibit featuring around 80 pieces of art from local collections, all



Mesa Contemporary
Arts Center

displayed on sidewalks along Main Street, from Country Club to Mesa drives, for public viewing. See everything from Humpty Dumpty and leaping frogs, to kids at play, larger-than-life animals, and a tribal ceremony.

New Kid on the Block

There's a wave of excitement in the air this month — everyone's talking about the latest heart and soul of downtown, the Mesa Arts Center on Main Street. This 212,774-square-foot newcomer to the city is the product of a \$94.5-million project, now standing as the largest arts center in Arizona. This state-of-the-art campus is comprised of a four-theater complex; Mesa Contemporary Arts, with five visual art exhibition spaces; the Art Studios building with 14 art studios and classrooms; and Shadow Walk, an outdoor landscaped oasis plaza. The Mesa Contemporary Arts Galleries celebrated its grand



photo by Dave Wilson

opening on April 22 and beginning this fall, will bring world-class entertainment including the Theater League's Best of Broadway series, classical and popular music, artists, dance, and a variety of family entertainment. In addition, a gallery complex and art education programs will feature more than 700 performing and visual arts classes for youth and adults at the Art Studios building.

Soaring Skies

In 1941, American and British pilots were brought to Mesa to train at the then newly constructed Williams Field and Falcon Field, facilities that now serve as Williams Gateway Airport (WGA) and Falcon Field Municipal Airport. The Commemorative Air Force Museum at Falcon

Field now holds a glimpse into the past, serving as home to "Sentimental Journey," an authentically restored WWII B-17 G still in flight today, among other warplanes and memorabilia.

WGA, on the other hand, is still in take off mode, serving as a fully functional facility. With three times the runway space as Sky Harbor International Airport, WGA was recently named 2004 Airport of the Year by the Arizona Department of Transportation, serving as the

left: *Spring Fever* by Kim Kori

below: *The Builder* by Art Norby



photo by Dave Wilson

busiest federal aviation administration contract tower in the United States. Cessna Aircraft Company established plans for a new 85,000-square-foot service center here. Representatives from WGA and Mesa Convention & Visitors Bureau have high expectations as they work to get the ball rolling with four airlines, discussing the possibility of bringing commercial passenger services to Mesa.

But the city's link to the skies doesn't end there — Fighter Combat International is ready to take thrill seekers on the ride of their lives as they head to the skies with military fighter pilots for barrel rolls, loops, hammerheads and inverted spins. If that's not extreme enough, aerial combat missions will take individuals up in the air for

Top Gun challenges at speeds reaching 250 miles per hour to test fighter combat skills in a head-to-head simulated winged battle.

Shop Talk

For those who prefer time on land, Mesa is full of unique shops, restaurants and golf courses where there's something for everyone. Antique lovers will find a haven of collectible antique furniture, glassware, jewelry and war memorabilia in dozens of boutiques and stores across town. Don't forget Fiesta Mall or Superstition Springs Center, which together house Sears, Macy's, Dillard's, Robinsons-May, and JCPenney, along with more than 165 specialty stores.

below: Arizona Museum for Youth's ArtVille activities

below center: Mesa Arts Center

below right: Sirrine House

bottom: The Sentimental Journey at Arizona Wing Museum



photo by Rick Senffner

*The hills are truly
alive in Mesa*

On a higher scale, the city really raised the bar in shopping destinations with the opening of Village Square at Dana Park, located on the northwest corner of Val Vista Drive and Baseline Road. This dynamic shopping destination, anchored by AJ's and Barnes & Noble, is described as Mesa's urban lifestyle center. Surrounded by hundreds of date palms, limestone fountains and cobblestone pavers, it offers upscale dining and shopping venues including Chico's, White House/Black Market, Rolf's and Buca di Beppo.

Full Swing

The hills are truly alive in Mesa. Thanks to the great Arizona sun, golfers all around town are swinging into action. Ranked the top public course in Arizona, Las Sendas Golf Club provides a challenging strategic course with a variety of shot options. Gracing the shadows of the Superstition Mountains, there is also the beautiful Viewpoint Golf Resort, featuring an 18-hole championship

course and nine-hole executive course with tree-lined fairways and rippling streams along with an elegant event center, clubhouse and banquet center. The Arizona Golf Resort and Conference Center recently completed a \$2-million upscale refurbishing project, making one of Mesa's finest resort properties even more exquisite. The property offers a Play-A-Round package for the season, inviting guests to experience the resort's indoor improvements and get a taste of golf on the home course and other select courses in the vicinity. At the base of Red Mountain, Longbow Golf Club offers a picturesque golfing experience on a must-play course with a rugged savanna, three-acre lake, and blooming desert wildflowers.

Founded as an agricultural region, Mesa has transformed into a culture-rich center for activity, offering an array of art and history museums, recreational facilities, 20 golf courses, and more than 50 city parks. The many attractions and experiences available in this rapidly expanding Arizona hot spot make Mesa a great place to live, work, and best of all, play. **.SM**

Longbow Golf Club



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